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CHRISTMAS

IN THE

HOSPITAL FOR SICK CHILDREN,

TORONTO.

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A Letter to the Well Children of Canada, who helped
to make Christmas a happy time for their
little Sick Friends.

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HOSPITAL FOR SICK CHILDREN.

TORONTO, Xmas, 1887.

DEAR CHILDREN—" 'Twas the night before Christmas"—no! 'twas the day before Christmas, and the door-bell had gone mad; usually a well-behaved bell, seldom ringing in the morning, while the nurses were busy with their little folks, or the maids with their work, but this day it considered no one, but kept on ringing hardly allowing time for the maid to reach the first room, where there was a table, and empty her arms of the parcels handed in at the door.

What made all this commotion? It was the loving hearts of the well children of our city, and all over the Province, sending their gifts to the little sick ones, who are unable to go out themselves or even see a toy save that sent into them. Gift after gift came pouring in from so many kind hearts till our matron's sitting-room looked like a very disorderly toy shop, with a large department devoted to fruit and confectionery.



It was one woman's work, and she kept very busy, to open the door and take in the parcels, some coming long distances by express, that our little folks might have them by Christmas day. One package came all the way from Bermuda. One of our nurses, who was "off duty" (invalided), sat at a desk and had her hands and head quite occupied making entries of all that came, and as far as practical, dropping notes of thanks to the kind donors.

Parents came with little gifts "from home" to be put in the stockings; something for "under their pillows," and as each requested, so we did, on the foot of each little cot, "nurse" tied a borrowed stocking, no child considering its own large enough for Santa Claus to fill. The next day, Monday, the same lady who for the past few years had given the Christmas dinner, sent it as usual, and for sick children, it was astonishing what an amount disappeared.

But the day of all days in the Children's Hospital is

"TREE DAY,"

held this year on Thursday, the 29th. The tree was planted in the girls' ward, first because it was the largest, and second, because the boys were in a better state to be moved down than the girls to be moved up. While we were decorating it the little folks would stretch their necks and exclaim, as a doll of larger size than usual or more gorgeously appparelled appeared from the huge basket on the floor and try in vain to catch a glimpse of the name attached to the slip. We

hung pretty fairy dolls on the tops and tips of branches, oranges prettily decorated with gay ribbons on heavier boughs, strapped dollies to the main stem, put marble bags and candy boxes in every available spot, nearly overbalanced ourselves in trying to tie flags on the top that seemed "so near and yet so far," placed the larger boxes of toys around the base of the tree, and finally hung a tin toy horse, or elephant, marked for the doctors, and dishes and dolls for the ladies of the committee, should any be present.

At a quarter to three the boys came down, most of them being able to walk with the aid of crutches. Their eyes grew very large, as they were allowed to walk round and round the tree, but not to touch or look at any of the names on the things.

At three sharp all joined in singing, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." At the last line of the last verse sleigh bells were heard in the distance coming nearer and nearer, and as the last notes died away (which they did very suddenly), old Santa Claus himself came rushing in. He greeted the children all round, said he could not go to every house on Christmas Day, so had to have "Their Tree" on Thursday, 29th, and was in a great hurry to get off to other trees for Sunday School children, so all must pay attention and answer to their names when called.

Miss Cody, our matron, and the writer began at once to cut down and hand to old Santa, who in turn handed to each

child. At first there was a slight fear over them at coming so near so revered a personage, and all dressed in fur, but as he could call them by name and ask after their various ills with a tender sympathy, they soon began to feel more at home with the funny old man.

Round and round he ran, first with dolls for the girls, then horses and reins, with bells attached for the boys, then candies all round. Next came books and boxes of larger and more expensive toys and games. Every child had all he or she could manage to hold with the assistance of laps as well as both hands. The children enjoyed it exceedingly when Santa Claus called out Miss Buchan, the treasurer, and gave her a doll about three inches long. Next, Mrs. Donald, the secretary, and presented her with a set of tiny dishes; but the fun reached its climax when he took a wooden dancing doll from the tree and read off my name. He stoutly maintained there was no such name on the Hospital books among the patients, that it was a hospital for sick children and there could not be a Mrs. in it. I was on the top of the ladder at the time and dozens of little fingers were pointed at me, crying out: "There she is, Santa Claus! there she is!" After searching every cot, he found me at last and looking me carefully over, told me he thought I was well enough to be dismissed, therefore he would not provide for me next Christmas.

After all was over, and Santa Claus had gone away, the

girls were told to invite the boys to have tea in their ward. Tables were brought in and set for them, and a happier lot of children could not be found.

Can you imagine the scene! All around the room were ranged the green cots, each holding a little child, some sitting up, some too ill for that, even on "Tree Day."

In the centre of the room, the tree, robbed of all its glory save a few flags at the top, then three tables where the boys were seated. Against the wall were stacked, like rifles, a group of crutches of various sizes, telling how few of those happy fellows could move without their aid. Attention! All eyes closed, all heads bowed that could bow, hands were placed together, and boys and girls bound together by the sad heritage of suffering, united their voices in the hymn:—

Be present at our table, Lord ;
 Be here and everywhere adored ;
 These mercies bless, and grant that we
 May feast in Paradise with Thee.

And then at once began their meal. How we wished that you all could have seen them. Some of the smaller boys hardly dare trust their treasures out of their own keeping even while they ate their meal, but the extra dainties provided for so extra an occasion prevailed, and hearty justice was done. Once more eyes closed, hands as well as voices were uplifted in their song of Thanksgiving,—

We thank Thee, Lord, for this our food.

The boys remained "to visit" a little while, till the dishes were cleared away. Then "Good nights" were exchanged, and they returned to their wards upstairs very tired, but very, very happy.

The usual routine of preparing the little folks and their sores for the night was attended to, and the day containing so much excitement as well as joy for the sick little folks, came to an end, and when night nurse came on duty at seven, the greater number were fast asleep, each holding one or more of the treasures gleaned that day from the tree.

May the same Saviour who took the little ones in his arms, put his hands upon them and blessed them, pour his best blessing on every little child who sent one gift, however small, to the suffering flock in the Toronto Hospital for Sick Children.

Believe me ever the friend of all children.

L. McMASTER,

President Hospital for Sick Children.
